

Smart Expressions

An exhibition of HSC Artworks

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Opening speech

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As an artist, I don't normally go to shows to listen to talks. I go because I want to see the art. But this is an exception, because I really like this space and especially because I was involved in the process of seeing these young artists develop today's work. I also have a son who did his HSC last year.

I do have to make a confession. Kathie emailed me the exhibition catalogue when it went to press, but I didn't look at it because I wanted to wait to use my naked eyes to look at the works: to feel. I think it is very important how one connects with the original works in the space, rather than looking at a reproduction. So when I came in, I said to Venita and Kathie: 'I feel this space is bigger.' I felt the art bound with the space and extended the space. On this note, I'd like to congratulate the Council on doing great things for art when elsewhere, arts funding has been cut. It is such a wonderful thing.

After I looked at the works, first, I was very happy because I found that any distance between the young artists and the rest of us in the room had closed – we are doing the same thing and share similar emotions. When you look at the works, there is a sense of darkness, sadness, decline, pain and anxiety. However, because they set in this professional art space, you feel safe. The voice that comes through these works is very profound. The artists have very mature views, and their concerns – what they want to express – are very important. I wanted to congratulate all the artists on three terms. First, creativity; second, courage; and third, sincerity.

When I say creativity, there are piles of things we can collect. For example, there is sensibility, intuition, knowledge, and technique. These works combine all of these.

When I talk about courage, I mean, first of all, being able to hang the work and putting a work in front of us. You feel like you just want to hide the work because it is so private. As you look at these works, the courage to learn from the masters, and then go beyond that – not thinking about copying anyone – is evident. The courage, which as an artist I know too well, to criticise themselves, put down a work, and start all over again the next day. The courage to go beyond. Sometimes, it is rather confronting. For example, several works in this exhibition comment on death. But death to them is not something to be feared. If you examine the works, you will find that the colours used are so bright. This may suggest that they confront death as part of life.

Sincerity is related to honesty. Art-making cannot be taken seriously because if you are too serious, you lose spontaneity. But, a good artist makes art with sincerity. In this way, art can project jokes and irony that leads to the expression of individual attitudes. All the concerns addressed here are personal, yet, universal. Although they are serious issues, the ways of saying them are totally different.

As much as I agree with Joseph Beuys statement that 'Everyone is an artist', I need to point out that most people stop making art at the age of 10. So again, congratulate yourself, because you have passed the borderline and excelled. So make sure, whether you do art at university or not, don't let that stop you from making art. It is embedded within you. You make art because you have an urge to express yourself on important issues that cannot be said any other way. That is your gift; that is your talent. Therefore you should never leave it. It is true that sincerity does mean that when you don't feel like making work, you let it go. But when you have something to say, you know that art is your language to express it.

You will find as you travel along the art path, that it will get more difficult to preserve these three things I mentioned. For example, some people run out of inspiration because they are terrified to break themselves. Instead they just make small alterations based on their existing works. The works that perhaps either brought them success or pleased the public, so they copy themselves and became slaves of their own work.

If you continue doing these three things – create, be daring and be sincere – you are not only doing yourself good, but also doing society a favour by helping to put things in a better place.

Congratulations again and enjoy the show.

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